

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—Tuesday, May 25, 1999

The House met at 9 a.m.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 25 minutes, and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate be continued beyond 9:50 a.m.

THE JUVENILE JUSTICE BILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CHABOT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. HASTERT. On behalf of the elected entire Republican leadership, I rise today to talk about the efforts of the House to respond to the national crisis surrounding violence in our schools.

Last week's shooting in Conyers, Georgia, only reinforced the fears of many parents about the safety of the schools which their children attend. Studies show that our Nation's schools on average are safer than ever, but average means nothing to the mothers and fathers who send their children to school every day. They want more from us, and we will provide more.

Last week the other body passed legislation that responded in part to the situation in our schools. Part of that legislative response included gun control legislation.

We support commonsense legislation that keeps guns out of the hands of unsupervised children. We support tightening laws to bring uniformity between gun shows and gun shops. We support instant background checks at gun shows.

We intend to bring these measures to the floor of the House, and I believe they will pass, but passing these measures is only part of the solution.

As I said on this floor last week, our children need to learn the differences between right and wrong. They need moral instruction, and they need a culture that reinforces positive values that help create a safer and more secure society.

What happened in Littleton, Colorado, and Conyers, Georgia, are gen-

uine national tragedies. It is natural that they should spur us to action, but it is wrong for anyone to simply try to score political points as a result of these tragedies.

I take a back seat to no one in this Congress when it comes to a desire to make our schools safer. I specifically spoke about safer schools from this well in my first speech as Speaker.

I taught high school for 16 years before entering public life. My two boys graduated from public high school not that long ago. My wife goes to work every day in a public school, just as she has for the last 33 years. I want her and the children she teaches to be safe.

Last week, in consultation with the minority leadership, we developed a timetable for consideration of a juvenile justice bill that would help make our schools safer. It was a very constructive meeting. I thought we had mapped out a very responsible, straightforward approach to handling this issue by prompt action of the authorizing committee, not riders on unrelated appropriation bills.

Unfortunately, it appears that despite the best efforts at the leadership level, more partisan elements are continuing to press for quicker, ill-considered action this week. We continue to believe, just as we proposed last week, that we should consider this bill in a timely yet responsible way.

In order to responsibly expedite matters, I asked the Committee on the Judiciary to move up its hearing on this issue by 3 weeks. They agreed, and will start hearings this Thursday.

I asked the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HYDE) to be prepared to mark up legislation the first week we get back from the Memorial Day district work period so it could be ready for the floor the next week. Again, this was much faster than originally proposed. He has agreed to do so.

Later today he and the chairman of the Subcommittee on Crime, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) will announce an outline of our youth violence legislation.

This legislation will focus on making our schools and our streets safer by prosecuting those who break the current gun laws. It will keep lawbreakers in jail longer. It will enact a zero tolerance policy for children who bring guns to school, and it will make sure that dangerous juveniles will not be able to buy guns lawfully when they become adults, and that we have open and complete juvenile records to help us keep guns out of their hands.

When we consider this legislation, the House will be able to work its will regarding certain provisions from the Senate package, just as I had assured the minority leader last week.

The House will vote on trigger locks, background checks at gun shows, and closing the gun purchasing loophole. We will expedite this legislation, but we will not force it through the system without the proper consideration of the Committee on the Judiciary.

Some of my colleagues, sensing an advantage, may try to go outside of the rules of the House and attach ill-considered riders to legislation not relevant to the juvenile justice issue. That would be a mistake. I know emotions are running high, but let us be honest about this. Even if we did pass legislation this week, it would still be the middle of June at the earliest before we could send a bill to the White House.

Pretending otherwise, and promising the victims of these terrible tragedies something else, does a tremendous disservice not only to us and to our institution, but to the very people we are trying to protect.

Our Nation's schoolchildren deserve to attend the safest, most secure schools that we can provide, and the parents of our children should rest secure in the knowledge that everything is being done within our powers, both as citizens and legislators, to create precisely that environment.

This is not the time to play on the fears of our most vulnerable. This is the time for aggressive yet responsible leadership, one in which we can think carefully and examine all of the issues before we go off half-informed, searching for the snappiest sound bite rather than working together to develop the best legislation that we can.

This is one of those rare times when the national consensus demands that we act, but it does not require us to rush to judgment, to risk compounding the situation by stampeding toward what sounds like the best way to score points against each other. We can do better than that, and I am determined to see that we will.

By cooperating, we can get a bill to the White House promptly, while making sure that the policies are ready to be enforced when schools reopen in September. The Nation's eyes have turned towards us, looking for responsible leadership. We must resist the temptation to score political points at the expense of the lives and families of our Nation's children.

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

Demagoguery for the sake of partisan advantage will not serve the country well, nor will it produce the best legislative solution possible. We have the opportunity to rise above partisanship and do ourselves and our Nation proud. I appeal to all the Members not to let this opportunity slip away.

We have responsible legislation and it is ready to go. It can be made better. Rushing it to the floor this week will not result in a better product in the long run. Let us come together, move forward, and develop the best legislation we can so that all Americans can take pride in how we respond.

THE FUTURE AMERICAN FLAG WILL HAVE 51 STARS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. MYRICK). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. Madam Speaker, when the House of Representatives debated legislation on Puerto Rico's self-determination, opponents argued that Puerto Ricans had a different culture, too alien from the rest of the Nation to become a partner.

But they were wrong. The ones that are not mainstream are those that subscribe to a nativist mindset. Have they listened to the radio? Have they watched a ballgame? Have they checked out who is doing art for the Treasury Department, or have they read Time Magazine lately?

Last week's cover of Time featured Puerto Rican pop star Ricky Martin, who boasts the number one song in America. The same article highlighted two other Puerto Rican pop culture success stories, vocalists Mark Anthony and actress-singer Jennifer Lopez.

Last year, baseball's American League recognized Puerto Rican Juan "Igor" Gonzalez of the Texas Rangers as its most valuable player, and 11-year-old Laura Hernandez from Puerto Rico is this year's First Place National Winner of the United States Savings Bond Poster Contest.

Right here next to Washington, D.C., in the Goddard Space Center, there are over 40 engineers and scientists who have come from Puerto Rico. They graduated from MIT; not Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but the Mayaguez Institute of Technology.

Time's May 24th cover story states, "We have seen the future. It looks like Ricky Martin. It sings like Mark Anthony. It dances like Jennifer Lopez. Que bueno." I, too, have seen the future, and I saw our flag with 51 stars. Que bueno.

THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL SECURITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of Jan-

uary 19, 1999, the gentleman Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk about an important issue for everyone in this country. It is social security. Everybody that is now receiving social security is concerned when Congress starts talking about changes in social security, because the fact is that one-third of the individuals that are now receiving social security depend on that social security check for 90 percent or more of their retirement income, a huge dependency. So it is easy to understand why seniors get nervous.

Everybody that is near retirement age is concerned, because they have planned their retirement and the fact is that social security is running out of money. Those individuals under 55 years of age are the generation most at risk, because they may be asked to spend a lot more paying for the retirement benefits of those that retired before them.

This week we are going to discuss what has been called a lockbox for social security. It does not fix social security, but it provides that Congress promises not to spend the social security trust fund surpluses for other government programs. It is a good start, but make no mistake, it does nothing to change the fundamentals of the programs and fix social security in the long run.

Briefly, let me describe, what the problems of social security are. When we started the social security program in 1934, it was developed as a pay-as-you-go program, where existing current workers paid in their social security tax for the benefits of existing current retirees, so essentially no savings. The social security taxes went in one week, and by the end of the week they were sent out in benefits to retirees.

The system worked very well in the early stages because there were 42 people working for every 1 retiree receiving those tax benefits. By 1950, the number of people working went down to 17 people working, sending in their social security taxes for every one retiree. Today it is 3 people working, sending in their social security taxes, for every retiree.

The estimate is that by 2030, there are only going to be 2 people working. So what we are asking those 2 people to do, without changes in the social security structure, without changes in the system, we are asking those two workers to try to earn and produce enough for their families plus one retiree; almost impossible.

The Federal Government, since it continues to raise taxes, and it has raised social security taxes 36 times since 1976, more often than once a year. Today 75 percent of our workers pay more in the social security tax than they do in income tax.

But as government raised those taxes on workers, they took the extra money coming in above and beyond what was needed for benefit payments for retirees and the families and the disabled and they spent the money on other government programs.

□ 0915

What that has done is dig us a \$700 billion IOU to future retirees that government, that Congress, that the President has no idea how to pay back.

I plead with my colleagues and, Madam Speaker, I plead with the American people to look at Social Security, look at how it is going to affect their lives and the future if Congress and the President is not willing to step up to the plate and deal with the serious problems of Social Security.

I have a proposal that I will be introducing in the next week that, provided we start slowing down some of the benefits for those high-income retirees and use some of that money for private investment accounts, to put that money into individual accounts so those individuals own that money, instead of Congress spending it on other programs.

Let me just finish by saying what tremendously complicates and should concern all of us in terms of how we deal with Social Security is a Supreme Court decision. In fact, two Supreme Court decisions. The Supreme Court has said there is no entitlement for Social Security benefits; that there is no relationship between the taxes we pay in and our right to receive any Social Security check when we retire. That means that the young generations, those under 55 years old, are completely dependent on future politicians deciding how much they might cut their benefits.

And just one last word, Madam Speaker. The longer we put this off, the more drastic the solution. Let us do it, let us get at it, and let us deal with it.

CONGRESS OWES AMERICAN PUBLIC LEGISLATION ON GUN SAFETY PRIOR TO MEMORIAL DAY RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. MYRICK). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Ms. DELAURO. Madam Speaker, I listened to the Speaker of the House this morning tell us that we cannot pass gun safety legislation in this body before we leave for the Memorial Day break for vacation. We owe it to the American people, to American families, to move on this legislation before we go home. We need to work on the people's timetable and not on the congressional timetable.